

Lesson 1

YOU ARE CALLED

Episode Summary

Mary Magdalene, Simon the fisherman, Matthew the tax collector, and Nicodemus the Pharisee are introduced. The episode is primarily about the torment Mary is experiencing because of her demonic possession. She is pushed to the very brink, but Jesus calls her by name and rescues her.

Key Verse

“But now thus says the Lord, he who created you, O Jacob, and he who formed you, O Israel: ‘Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine.’” (Isaiah 43:1)

Additional Verses

Psalms 139:13–18; Ephesians 2:8–10

Episode Theme

God knows us and sees us, no matter our past choices, current circumstances, or future prospects. Through Jesus, He’s calling us to Himself, to rescue and redeem us. Which means we no longer have to fear.

Opening Discussion

The Chosen is a multi-season television show about the life of Christ. You’ll be watching season 1 together in this group. Each time you meet, you’ll watch an episode and then talk about it.

In episode 1, “I Have Called You by Name,” we meet Mary Magdalene, Simon (who will become Peter), Matthew the tax collector, and Nicodemus the Pharisee. This episode focuses on Mary, whose life is far from anything she’d imagined or hoped for. She’s in desperate need of rescue.

Before you watch the episode, be sure everyone in your group knows each other and make introductions if helpful.

Begin by reading the following:

Fear Not

Fear can be like a blob monster—always on the move, always taking ground— because the list of things we fear is long. We fear loss. We fear failure. We fear not being loved. We fear disease. We fear loneliness, darkness, neediness, natural disasters, and bad guys—the list goes on into oblivion.

“I Have Called You by Name” is a fitting title for season 1, episode 1 of *The Chosen* because no other declaration, no other truth in this world, has the power to vaporize fear like knowing and being known by God.

Why is that?

Well, truth be told, we’re simple creatures in that we were made to be in relationship with God. We’re designed to commune, to know and be known by our Creator, to interact with the world alongside Him and under His care. Without Him, we’re at the mercy of the world around us and all the fear it brings. Without Him, there’s a significant and unfillable void in our souls, because contrary to the popular self-empowerment dogma of the day, on our own we are *not* enough.

But that’s okay; that’s the way it’s supposed to be. We’re incomplete by design so that nothing but knowing and communing with God will fulfill us—not really, not permanently or completely. We’re incomplete so we’ll come running when the One to whom we belong calls.

Discuss the following question as a group:

What do you fear, and why?

WATCH THE EPISODE TOGETHER.

Discussion Questions

As a group, read through the “Worthy, Not Worthy” section and discuss the following:

Worthy, Not Worthy

The notion of being called into relationship with God can bring with it some intrinsic hang-ups, like pride and insecurity that, as it turns out, are two sides of the same bad theology coin.

Heads. Prideful people tend to see themselves as being already worthy of God's love and approval. By their own system of measurement, they are "good" and deserving of the

corresponding spiritual status. But having an over-inflated view of ourselves can keep us from repenting and responding to God's call with our whole hearts.

Tails. Insecure people struggle to believe God's love is big enough to wipe out their personal history of wrongdoing, causing them to feel **hopelessly unworthy** of His offer to redeem and restore. But having an under-inflated view of ourselves can keep us from accepting and responding to God's call with our whole hearts.

In either case, the focus is on us instead of God.

Truth be told, most of us vacillate between pride and insecurity – between feeling worthy already and hopelessly unworthy – depending on the day. But take heart. Just as it was for Isaiah and the nation of Israel, God's call on our lives has very little to do with us and everything to do with Him.

Same thing was true for the people Jesus called.

Mary Magdalene was called out of the most obvious kind of darkness. Being possessed by seven demons is like the plot line of a horror movie, which means Mary didn't earn the Savior's help with good behavior. Like OT Israel, the call on her life was by divine initiative and executed by Jesus *in spite* of who she was and for the sake of who He created her to be.

Nicodemus, on the other hand, was pretty confident of his spiritual status. He was a Pharisee, set apart for the Lord's service and therefore considered by those around him to be worthy of the deference, respect, and privilege that came with his position. He likely, believed he was worthy of God's calling already, which means his position and pride made him slow to see his own desperate need for reconciliation with God.

Matthew was likely too busy living for himself to care whether or not he was worthy. He was pursuing his own thing, mainly money. Regarding our coin illustration, he would've missed the lesson entirely and probably would've tossed the silver into his money bag instead! For a time, it seemed he was oblivious – or at least indifferent – to God's call on his life.

Simon wore his messy heart on his sleeve – his sometimes prideful, sometimes insecure heart on his rolled-up, gotta-earn-my-own-worth sleeve. His self-sufficiency would have been useful on a fishing boat, but it often delayed his understanding and the corresponding action when it came to following Jesus.

Incidentally, in episode 1 of *The Chosen*, Mary Magdalene serves as the ideal respondent to God's call through Jesus. Nicodemus would've been horrified by the notion: *A demonized woman from the red quarter is the model we're supposed to follow?* Matthew would've been bewildered: *What's all the fuss about? And can it be taxed?* Simon would've perhaps felt cheated: *How could she receive God's calling when I'm clearly trying harder?!*

But Mary, desperate Mary, was so hopeless that while being rescued was entirely outside the scope of her imagination, she responded at once. And with her whole heart.

To whatever degree we're prideful, insecure, or just plain desperate, God's calling happens when we aren't even aware we're broken versions of ourselves. Calling happens before God begins His transformative work of redemption, because He sees past our *before* to the *after* that He purposed and planned from the beginning. Just as He did with the nation of Israel, He sees past our fear, past our messy hearts and lives, to the people He created and loves enough to call His own.

We're valuable to God because He made us and loves us. We're valuable because He says we are, and His Word is the be-all-end-all. But He calls us to Himself because of who He is, not because we're worthy – which actually means we can be confident in our calling since it's based on His goodness, His forgiveness, and His grace (just to name a few).

Discussion Questions

1. **Which of the four flawed-but-still-called characters in *The Chosen* do you identify with most?**
2. **What would you say to someone who feels unworthy of Jesus's love and call to follow Him (like Mary Magdalene)? What would you say to someone who is confident in their own goodness or self-sufficiency (like Nicodemus)?**
3. **What do you need to be rescued from?**
 - A difficult personal history and pain? Mary lost her family, her dignity, and her self-control; Matthew was shunned by his family and by everyone else.
 - Financial hardship? Simon and Andrew felt the weight of Roman taxation and the struggle to provide.
 - A worldview that says we must save ourselves? Many Pharisees were legalistic, constantly trying to impress God and one another; Simon often took matters into his own hands, relying on his own ability, wisdom, and strength.
 - Darkness, addiction, or some other sin cycle? Demons plagued Mary, causing her to feel hopeless and chained to a sinful life; Matthew was ruled by his love of money and desire for security.
4. **How might Isaiah 43:1 challenge you to think differently about your situation? And what might it be calling you to do differently?**
5. **What does Ephesians 2:8–10 say about God's rescue of people through Jesus?**

Close by reading the following:

Jesus Is Our Rescuer

Jesus came to live among us; only He didn't sin. He came to rescue us from the penalty of sin, which is death and eternal separation from a holy God. He came to rescue us from sin's power over us and its daily stranglehold on our lives. And all we have to do to be forgiven and welcomed into communion with God is to believe in the One He sent.

That's it.

But also, that's everything.

None of us is worthy of God's loving attention. To be called by Him and to accept His invitation through Jesus—to be chosen and rescued in spite of our absolute unworthiness—requires us to trust Him, which includes letting Him make whatever changes to our lives He deems best. And when we do, fear no longer has a place.

Fear not, God can redeem your choices and use them for good.

Fear not, God can heal your heart, your body, and your relationships.

Fear not, you were made for more than what you've experienced so far.

Fear not, the King of the Universe has called you by name.

Prayer Focus

Thank God for knowing you and for wanting to be in relationship with you. Confess your unworthiness to be called at all. If need be, confess any pride or ego-motivated attempts to become worthy of His love through your own effort. Praise God for calling you to Himself in spite of all the ways you get it wrong, and for sending Jesus to rescue you and to secure your calling.